

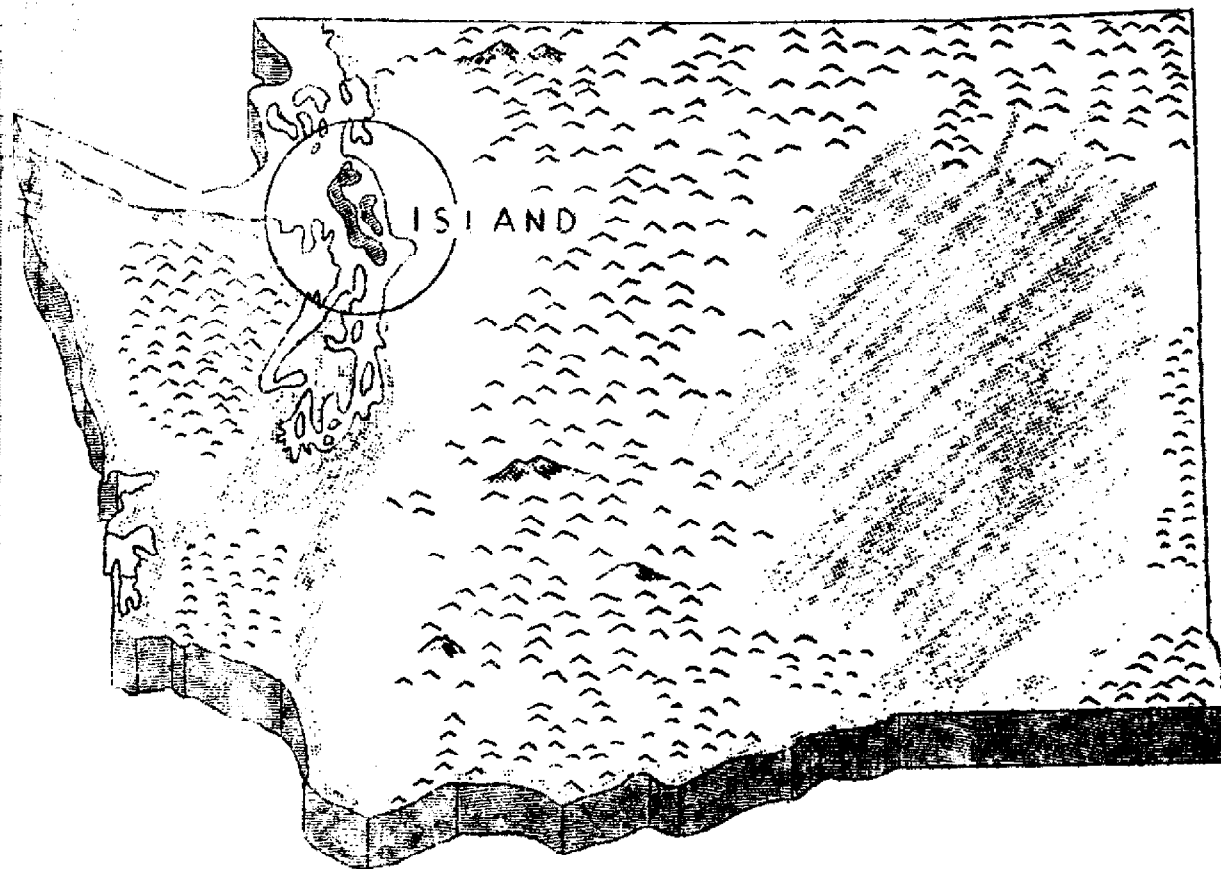
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ISLAND COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES
1956



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Sverre N. Omdahl, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Marketing Service
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WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE
348 Federal Office Building
Seattle 4, Washington

FOREWORD

This book on Island County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington. This project was initiated in 1956 through funds made available by Sverre N. Omdahl, Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture, 1948-56. State funds were matched by moneys from the United States Department of Agriculture under the Research and Marketing Act of 1946.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals both in private enterprise and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Island County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by vocational agriculture and social studies teachers in Island County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over all appreciation of Island County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture 1860 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Island County in 1853. Facts on topography soil, climate and forests which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture, Irwin L. Pedersen, student in agricultural economics, Washington State College and resident of Bellingham, Whatcom County, wrote the sections on pattern of agriculture, crops, livestock and marketing and collected much original information. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Leonard W. Orvold, D. W. Barrowman, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service prepared tabular material for the book.

J. D. Dwyer, Director
Washington State Department of Agriculture

Olympia, Washington
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PART I

History of Island County Agriculture

Introduction

Island County consists of two major islands in Puget Sound in northwestern Washington. One of the two islands is Whidbey; the other is Camano. With gentle topography, sheltered coves and harbors and rich soils, these islands were one of the early sections of the state to be settled. Easily accessible to the early shipping trade, an important commercial agriculture was developed by its pioneers. Favored by good natural conditions of soil and climate and improved transportation to markets, Island County has continued to attract farm settlers and to maintain an agricultural economy of considerable importance.

With only 208 square miles of land area, Island is the smallest county in the state. However, the good quality of its land for farming and home-making, compared to some of the mountain counties of Washington, give it a higher rank in population and agricultural production. In 1955, Island ranked 24th in population density in the state--58 persons per square mile of land area. In 1954, the county's farmers marketed farm products valued at \$2,588,862, which ranked it 29th among Washington counties. The number of farms and amount of farm production in the county have decreased since 1940, principally as a result of a large naval air station built on Whidbey Island during World War II. The county ranks tenth in the state in poultry farming, eighteenth in dairying and twenty-sixth in horticultural specialty products. It is also noted for commercial squash production and berry growing.

History 1/

Before the settlement of white men, present Island County was occupied by village groups of Snohomish and Swinomish Indians generally related to the Skagit tribe. They were canoe Indians who lived primarily by fishing in Puget Sound. They also hunted deer and rabbits and collected roots and berries from the heavily forested islands. The surroundings of seashore, forests, upland prairies and marshlands of the nearby Skagit River delta yielded abundant food and they had the leisure time to build permanent settlements. Warriors traveled long distances on Puget Sound in large cedar canoes. There were frequent

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invasions by war canoes of Clallam and Haida Indians from the north who came to capture slaves.

The island Indians made their first contact with whites in June of 1792, when Joseph Whidbey, a member of the British expedition under Captain George Vancouver, was exploring Deception Pass. There was some contact with traders and trappers of Hudson Bay Fur Company between 1820 and 1840. About 1840, Chief Tsalakum of the island tribe invited the Roman Catholic mission at Cowlitz Prairie, in present Lewis County, to introduce Christianity to his people. Father Francis Blanchet arrived from Cowlitz in 1840 and the Indians built a church at Penn's Cove. In accordance with the Treaty of Point Elliot in 1855 between the United States and the Skagit Indians, Island County Indians moved to the Swinomish and Tulalip Reservations.

The present Island County area of land and water was explored by the Spanish and British during 1791 and 1792. These rival expeditions made charts of Puget Sound and gave names to the principal land features. A Spanish expedition under Francisco Biza entered the Straits of Juan de Fuca in 1890 and Manuel Quimper of that expedition explored and charted the San Juan Islands and Admiralty Inlet. Spanish names were given to Camano Island, Rosario Strait and to the site of the present village of San de Fuca. In 1792, the British expedition under George Vancouver explored the same waters. A junior officer, Joseph Whidbey, of the British naval force, explored Deception Pass with a small boat party. He named this feature Deception because it gave the deception of being a harbor entrance instead of a narrow strait. On discovering that the present land mass of Whidbey Island was separated from the mainland by a narrow tidal passage, he corrected the map of the area. His name became the permanent geographic name of this major feature of Island County.

The first exploration by the American Government was the U. S. Navy expedition under Lieutenant Charles Wilkes in 1841. In that year, Wilkes sailed the U. S. Brig Porpoise into Penn's Cove and explored parts of Whidbey Island. Descriptions of the Indians and the flora and fauna were recorded in Wilkes' journals. Holmes Harbor was named after the assistant surgeon of the expedition, Silas Holmes.

The Island County area was under joint occupation or jurisdiction of the British and American governments under the Provisional Government of Oregon between 1843 and 1846. The dispute over the Puget Sound area between the two

1/ This historical summary has been derived from four sources:

- (1) Frederick Buerstatte, The Geography of Whidbey Island, Master of Arts Thesis, University of Washington, Seattle, 1947.
- (2) Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State (American Guide Series). Writers' Program of the Works Project Administration, State of Washington. Sponsored by the Washington State Historical Society. Published by Binferds & Mort, Portland, Oregon, 1941.
- (3) George Kellogg, A History of Whidbey's Island. Oak Harbor, Washington: George B. Astel, printer. 1934.
- (4) Richard M. Perry, The Counties of Washington, Published by Secretary of State, Olympia, Washington (mimeographed).

countries was resolved by the treaty of 1846, which established the boundary at the 49th parallel. On August 13, 1848, Oregon Territory was established, which embraced all of the present State of Washington.

Early land settlement by Americans on Whidbey Island was under the provisions of the Donation Land Act, passed by Congress in 1850. A donation land claim for a married settler included a square mile, or a section of 640 acres. Island County attracted early settlers who arrived at Puget Sound on sailing vessels.

The early settlers on Whidbey Island were attracted by the prairies and accessible coves where landings could be made. The oak tree prairie at Oak Harbor was first settled by a Norwegian immigrant, Zakarias Toftezen, in 1849. A Scot, John M. Izett, settled in 1854, and built a small shipyard at Oak Harbor. Captain Thomas Coupe, a New England mariner, took a donation land claim in 1852 and established the village of Coupeville. It was early termed the "Port of Sea Captains" because numerous mariners retired in this village. The San de Fuca vicinity was first settled by R. B. Holbrook in the early 1850's. Coveland, on Penn's Cove, was settled by B. P. Barstow, who established a trading post. A prominent land settler was Colonel Isaac N. Ebay, who took a donation land claim on Ebay Prairie near Coupeville in 1850. He was an Indian Agent for the U. S. Government and an early trader and businessman.

Mainly through the efforts of Colonel Ebay, Island County was created by the Oregon Territorial Legislature on January 6, 1853. Island County had 195 inhabitants in its first census. From 1853 to 1860 population grew slowly because of transportation difficulties and north coast Indian hostility. A war party of Haidah Indians from Canada invaded the island in 1857 and killed Colonel Ebay. By 1860 the population had grown to 294 persons. Land speculation brought many temporary settlers to the island.

Pioneer agriculture was mainly for home use and some small-scale, irregular sales to ships stopping at Penn's Cove, Oak Harbor and Langley. Some foods and grains were boated across Admiralty Inlet of Puget Sound to the lumber town of Port Townsend.

A report on Whidbey Island for 1859 reveals a system of general farming with about one-third of the harvested acreage in grains, one-third in potatoes and one-third in miscellaneous vegetables. Pasture grasses and hay supported a total of 809 beef cattle, 544 hogs and 150 sheep. One pioneer farmer of note was Samuel B. Crockett, who specialized in timothy seed for sale to neighboring farmers. In 1859, he raised 320 acres of timothy hay on his claim south of Penn's Cove.

From 1870 to 1900 Island County agriculture and settlement grew as more settlers arrived and newer market outlets were found for crops and livestock. Expanded export of piling, logs, cordwood, wheat, potatoes and butter provided an economic base for numerous new farm and town settlers. Increased market outlets at Port Townsend, Seattle, Everett, Bellingham and in Alaska had an important influence in the county's agricultural growth. The population increased three-fold, from 626 to 1,870 in 1900.

In the late 1880's the first dairy products plant was founded. J. M. Izett and Sons Oak Harbor Creamery produced about 100 pounds of butter daily. This

industry gave an impetus to raising dairy livestock which had not been profitable before because of difficulty of exporting cream or milk from the island.

Another development which helped the island farmers was the demand for potatoes and other foodstuffs in the Alaska gold camps from 1900 to 1905. Potato growing for a time became the major agricultural industry. During the "potato boom" Chinese laborers were brought to Whidbey Island. Some absentee land owners also rented land to or contracted with the Chinese to grow potatoes. Hostile feeling developed by competing growers forced the Chinese tenant farmers and field laborers off Whidbey Island in later years, closing an unusual period in its agricultural history.

A migration of Hollanders to Whidbey Island from Holland, Michigan resulted in an important advance in agriculture. The movement was started in 1894 when E. E. Werkman traveled to Michigan and interested a party of Hollanders in the farming opportunities in Island County. 1/ On March 17, 1895, an immigrant party of eighteen Hollander families arrived at Oak Harbor. Among them were L. Jacobuse, T. Haan, O. Helier, J. Bolt, J. Oldhuus, E. Jenker, A. Schlans, M. Lichtenbert and S. F. Hulman, expert cheese-maker. The Hollanders bought land in Clover Valley north of Oak Harbor. Several years later sixty more Hollanders joined the agricultural colony on the north end of Whidbey Island and as a result, Hollanders became the largest foreign-born immigrant group in the county, numbering 283 according to the Census of 1920. Their farming industry and practices brought much new land into productive cultivation. They were instrumental in developing dairy, poultry, bulb and vegetable seed farming.

A period of logging and lumbering increased Island County population between 1900 and 1910. At Coupeville, a boat and small ship building yard employed a number of men. The 1910 population of 4,704 was more than double that of 1900. Many of the new arrivals took up land for part-time farming on cut-over land.

From 1910 to 1940 the expansion of farming and general population growth was slow. The inhabitants numbered 6,098 in the Census of 1940, an increase of only 1,384 in 40 years. Rural farm population decreased slightly as the incorporated towns of Coupeville, the county seat, and Langley and Oak Harbor grew. Ferry and shipping service was greatly improved starting about 1910. Agriculture had previously been handicapped by irregular and infrequent shipping to the mainland. In 1910 the service of two regular daily ferry trips between Seattle and Coupeville was started. A freight ferry, the "Fairhaven" loaded grain and perishable produce at Coupeville three times per week. Other vessels served all Whidbey and Camano Island ports. North Whidbey Island gradually became the main agricultural section of the county as roads and ferry services were improved.

A major development in transportation was the construction of the Deception Pass Bridge in 1935. Connected by truck to the mainland of Skagit County and thereby to processing plants at Mount Vernon and Burlington and markets such as Seattle, Island County farmers were able to specialize in a greater variety of commercial crops and livestock.

1/ George Kellog, A History of Whidbey Island, page 94.